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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 19th MEETING

Chairman:	Mr. SENGWE (Vice-Chairman)	(Zimbabwe)
later:	Mr. KALPAGE (Chairman)	(Sri Lanka)

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In the absence of Mr. Kalpagé (Sri Lanka), Mr. Sengwe (Zimbabwe), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 85: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (continued) (A/48/13 and Add.1 and Add.1/Corr.1, A/48/117-S/25428, A/48/132, A/48/253-S/26045, A/48/263-S/26078, A/48/275, A/48/284-S/26191, A/48/287-S/26201, A/48/372, A/48/373, A/48/374, A/48/375, A/48/376, A/48/377, A/48/410-S/26465, A/48/415-S/26473, A/48/431, A/48/474 and A/48/554)

1. Mr. SHAHEED (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the excellent report submitted by the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) (A/48/13) reflected all the efforts made by the Agency in behalf of the Palestine refugees, particularly in the areas of health and education, despite the difficult situation prevailing in the occupied territories and the lack of resources. He wished, however, to make some observations which, although repeated year after year, had not received the attention they deserved. The Syrian Arab Republic and other Arab countries which received Palestine refugees were providing them with a substantial volume of assistance and services, and they wanted the high cost of those activities to be taken into account. The 1994 budget of the Agency should be increased in order to increase services for refugees. In paragraph 35 of his report, the Commissioner-General had highlighted some aspects of the critical situation of the refugee families. The crisis of resources affected the refugees, inasmuch as the reduction of expenditure was made at their expense. Other solutions must be found; an appeal could be made to donors to increase their contributions, the Agency could be transferred to Beirut in order to save on expenses, local purchasing could be increased in order to take advantage of lower prices and an advantageous exchange rate, and unnecessary expenditures could be avoided. That was the only way to overcome the crisis and stop depriving the refugees of badly needed services.

2. Among the services which UNRWA provided to the Palestinians, the education programme was the most important. The problems occasioned by classroom crowding and old, inadequate buildings had been aggravated by the reduction of educational services as a result of the budgetary deficit of UNRWA. Furthermore, support should be provided to the Damascus Training Centre in order to enable it to receive more Palestinian students, student fees should be eliminated, and university scholarships should be increased.

3. With regard to health services, he stressed the need to guarantee health care for all refugees, in view of their difficult circumstances and the high cost of those services. Surgical procedures should be carried out free of charge. Social services should also be increased, loans should be provided, housing should be built, and income-generating activities should be carried out in order to improve the living conditions of the Palestine refugees.

4. His delegation was dissatisfied at the $19 million reduction in the proposed UNRWA budget for the Syrian Arab Republic for 1994-1995. That

(Mr. Shaheed, Syrian Arab Republic)

reduction would affect many aspects of the Agency's operations, while, at the same time, the budget for other countries had increased. Consequently, he requested that the proposed budget should be revised and that the same criteria should be applied to Syria as to other countries of the region.

5. The problem of Palestine refugees was essentially an international responsibility; the aid provided was not commensurate with the enormity of the tragedy brought about by the Israeli occupation. The problems of the Palestine refugees had persisted because Israel did not respect the rules of international law with regard to repatriation. More than 3 million refugees in Syria had not been able to return to their place of origin despite the provisions of General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

6. At the Madrid Peace Conference, the need for a just and comprehensive solution for the region based on the application of the pertinent Security Council and General Assembly resolutions had been recognized. All the countries of the world had welcomed the peace process, which was based on international law and on the procedure outlined at the Madrid Conference. The eleventh round of peace talks had been based on those principles, until the secret peace agreement on Gaza and Jericho, which departed from the aforementioned guidelines, had been revealed. Disregarding 50 years of struggle, Israel had tried to give the impression that those agreements would finally place the region on the threshold of peace and stability. His delegation was of the view that the agreements on Gaza and Jericho did not constitute a complete peace agreement, and that it was not fair to accuse those who criticized them or made an objective analysis of their negative aspects of being opposed to the overall peace process. Nor was it fair to ask countries to act as if the signing of that agreement had in fact brought peace to the region. Experience had shown that partial solutions did not lead to true and lasting peace. The time for empty words was over: they only served to justify the continuation of occupation. The victims and the aggressors now had a unique and historic opportunity to put an end to decades of destructive struggle, and they should make the most of it.

7. He wished to reiterate the need to strengthen cooperation between Syria and UNRWA until such time as a definitive solution could be found to the problem of the Palestine refugees, and until they could be guaranteed an opportunity to return to their place of origin.

8. Mr. SINHASENI (Thailand) expressed his appreciation for the comprehensive report of the Commissioner-General on the work of UNRWA which, since its establishment, had had to work under the discouraging political climate prevailing in the Middle East. In that regard, his delegation wished to pay tribute to the men who with their painstaking efforts and sacrifice had made possible the signing on 13 September 1993 of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements for Gaza and Jericho. The Government of Thailand urged all parties to cooperate fully with one another, and undertook to monitor that positive development closely and to render its full support. Nevertheless, the services provided by UNRWA remained indispensable to the livelihood and well-being of the Palestine refugees. The Agency's role should

(Mr. Sinhaseni, Thailand)

now be focused on the implementation of an integrated programme of assistance, as part of the reconstruction and rehabilitation process.

9. His delegation commended UNRWA for the educational services it was providing to the Palestinian people, which would surely help to bring about greater popular participation in development. It was to be hoped that, with the recent agreement, education and training programmes would no longer be interrupted. The Agency's record in the area of health care, relief and social services was also admirable. That was particularly so since the demands on those services continued to increase as a result both of demographic growth and of vulnerable economic and social conditions.

10. Arms truce and political solution alone were not enough to generate economic and social well-being, which was the essential precondition for a just and lasting peace. The work of UNRWA had contributed significantly to the Palestinians' political struggle, and must be sustained. That was why his delegation was deeply concerned that the financial situation of the Agency would require it to reduce its services. Strenuous efforts should be made to raise additional funds in order to enable the Agency to cope with the increased demands and to improve its flexibility in responding to emergency situations. Thailand had made regular contributions to UNRWA, and would maintain the level of its support.

11. His delegation joined the Palestinian and Israeli peoples in hoping that the signing of the letter of mutual recognition between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government in Gaza and Jericho would bring to a close the lengthy chapter of pain and suffering in the Middle East.

12. Mr. ASHIKI (Japan) said that his country hoped that the Declaration of Principles signed by the PLO and Israel would be the first step towards a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. It was important that all the parties involved in the process should act in good faith and receive the international community's full support. As Prime Minister Hosokawa had announced to the General Assembly, Japan intended to extend about $200 million in assistance to the Palestinian people over the following two years, including grant aid for food and medicine and concessional loans for infrastructure building. In addition, the Japanese Government had sent a team to the region to collect information on development needs.

13. Japan believed that the agreement between Israel and the PLO could produce a genuine peace dividend which would benefit both parties. It was therefore important that the international community should join efforts to improve the living standards of the inhabitants of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

14. During the transition period UNRWA would have an even more crucial role to play because it would be necessary to improve significantly the social and welfare services provided to the Palestinian people. To that end, Japan had decided to contribute $500,000 to the 1993 UNRWA expanded programme of assistance.

(Mr. Ashiki, Japan)

15. One of the most essential ingredients for successful self-government was human resources. Over the previous three years, the Government of Japan had financed the studies of more than 200 students through its higher-education scholarship programme. In 1993 it would be providing scholarships worth $10,000 each to 40 students.

16. The Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic who continued to require assistance should not be forgotten in the transition period. Consequently, the Government of Japan had decided to contribute $780,000 to the Baqa'a Girls' School in Jordan and to provide food aid valued at 1 billion yen to Palestine refugees through UNRWA. Moreover, it had sent vocational-training experts to the Wadi Seer Training Centre in Jordan and more recently to the UNRWA Training Centre in Damascus. Since 1985 more than 100 Palestine refugees had received vocational training in Japan.

17. The Government of Japan had responded to the Commissioner-General's appeal by increasing its cash contributions to UNRWA by $1 million. Its total contribution had risen to $12 million.

18. Ms. McKAY (Australia) said that the recent events in the Middle East presented UNRWA with new challenges and the prospect of a significantly expanded role, for which it was eminently qualified.

19. Within the past year in the occupied territory there had been acts of violence ranging from collective punishment of the Palestinian population to mass deportation and the imposition of curfews, with the consequent effects on schooling, medical services and the work of UNRWA itself. There had also been a high number of fatalities and an unprecedented deterioration in economic and social conditions which had culminated in Israel's closure of the occupied territory. At the same time, her delegation acknowledged the importance of the signing of the Declaration of Principles by Israel and the PLO.

20. UNRWA had carried out vital work in education which would be the foundation for the new self-governing territory and its administration. It should be pointed out that UNRWA programmes in education, health, relief and social services for the 1.7 million refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic were as vital as they had always been.

21. Australia was concerned that UNRWA had again failed to receive funding sufficient to deliver all parts of its planned programmes in 1993 and commended the Commissioner-General for his efforts to raise the needed funds. The significant reduction of the deficit from $28.5 million to some $4 million must be weighed against the cuts in some programmes and limitations in others. Her delegation welcomed the Commissioner-General's plans to look for more innovative ways to assist Palestine refugees and to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the Agency's programmes.

22. Australia, which had attended the international donors' conference to support the peace agreement, would provide $15 million over a period of three years for a range of development activities, including income generation,

(Ms. McKay, Australia)

training, health, sanitation and water resources, which represented an increase of 50 per cent in its assistance to Palestinians. A large proportion of that sum would be provided to UNRWA to support new and existing programmes.

23. Mr. ANSAY (Permanent Observer for the Organization of the Islamic Conference) said that the fact that UNRWA existed 43 years after its inception was in a sense indicative of the international community's failure to bring about a just and lasting solution to the plight of the Palestine refugees. However, it was encouraging that common sense and sagacity had prevailed and that specific and constructive measures were being taken to achieve peace in the Middle East.

24. UNRWA provided education, health care, relief, and social services and general assistance to 2.8 million registered Palestine refugees through a network of 632 schools, 104 health centres and numerous other facilities. Those activities, carried out by 20,000 staff members, benefited nearly 3 million people with a modest budget of $327 million. It should be pointed out that UNRWA was created solely for Palestine refugees because of the historical context of the problem of Palestine and that those refugees should receive assistance from the international community until the problem was resolved.

25. In spite of the recent events in the region, the Palestinian community hoped that the Agency's services would continue and possibly expand during the transition period. Certainly, the scope of UNRWA's role would be determined by the wishes of the parties concerned, particularly the Palestinians.

26. President Arafat, during his meeting with the Commissioner-General the previous month in Tunis, had said that UNRWA should expand its activities and carry on its traditional role. The Organization of the Islamic Conference also firmly believed that UNRWA should maintain ongoing programmes alongside its new ventures. In that context he stressed the recent announcement by the Commissioner-General in Vienna of a new Agency initiative, the peace implementation programme, to support the Middle East peace process. The programme's priorities were to improve the social and economic conditions of Palestine refugees in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and included major construction and development projects which would help create employment. The Commissioner-General's announcement that UNRWA would expand its loans programme to Palestinian businesses was also heartening.

27. It was commendable that during such a trying time UNRWA's projected cash shortfall of $28.5 million had been reduced to approximately $4 million, as a result of austerity measures and administrative savings as well as the new contributions recently pledged.

28. The international community should ensure that the Agency was supplied with the resources and moral support it needed. UNRWA's vital humanitarian assistance must continue, and therefore the Agency would continue to need the full assistance and support of Member States, particularly donor countries. Although UNRWA had been established as a temporary body, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and its 51 member countries considered the Agency to be the

(Mr. Ansay, Observer, Organization of the Islamic Conference)

most fitting humanitarian body to assist the Palestinian people during the transition period.

29. At their annual meeting, held in New York on 29 September 1993, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Organization of the Islamic Conference had expressed their deep appreciation for the commendable efforts made by the Commissioner-General, Mr. Ilter Türkmen, in the discharge of his responsibilities and had recommended the renewal of his mandate, in line with similar recommendations made by the Council of Foreign Ministers of the League of Arab States and the members of the UNRWA Advisory Commission.

30. Mr. AL HASSAN (Oman) said that from the time of its establishment UNRWA had earned great credit providing services to 2.8 million registered Palestine refugees and in his delegation's view it was the most appropriate agency for carrying out that function. Oman supported the measures taken by UNRWA with regard to the recent Middle East peace agreements.

31. Given that the refugee problem was a political one, he urged Israel to apply the relevant United Nations resolutions, particularly General Assembly resolution 194 (III), paragraph 11, and to respect the fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, under which the occupying Power was obliged to guarantee the safety of civilians in time of war.

32. The peace process initiated in Madrid had contributed to the signing of the Declaration of Principles and the mutual recognition between the PLO and Israel. In that connection, he hoped that the relevant resolutions would be implemented, adding that he supported the "land-for-peace" initiative, which he considered encouraging.

33. Despite the peace process, the situation in the Arab territories was deteriorating, as was clear from document A/48/13, the first paragraph of which he quoted. Many Israeli practices vitiated the safety of those inhabiting the occupied territories. The closure of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem indicated the gravity of the situation. The report also gave a vivid picture of the illegal actions committed by Israel, such as the killings of Palestinians, the destruction of homes, deportations and arrests of thousands of people. In that connection, he quoted paragraphs 13 to 16 and 19 of the Commissioner-General's report. He also referred to paragraph 20, which described how UNRWA staff had been subjected to beatings, threats and detention. He therefore urged Israel to respect the immunity and privileges of Agency staff.

34. He hoped that resolutions relating to the situation would be implemented by international organizations and that measures would be taken to guarantee the safety of staff. In conclusion he stated that Oman had given constant moral and financial support to UNRWA, which he hoped would continue to provide its excellent services.

35. Mr. AL OTAIBI (Kuwait) pointed out that, despite the positive developments in the Middle East peace process, the Palestinian people were still suffering from difficult living conditions in the occupied territories and elsewhere. His delegation had carefully studied the report by the Commissioner-General of UNRWA (A/48/13) and had listened with interest when he had addressed the Committee at the time that consideration of the item had begun. Kuwait wished to place on record its concern over the Israeli practices mentioned in the report, which violated the most basic rights of the Palestinian people. The Israeli occupation forces continued to apply repressive policies and refused to comply with resolutions by international bodies. World public opinion could testify that the Palestinians were still subjected to arbitrary acts such as the demolition of their homes, curfews, forced deportations, the confiscation of goods and hardships of every kind.

36. Since its creation in 1949, in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 302 (IV), UNRWA had provided the almost 3 million Palestinians who lived in the Agency's five operational areas with numerous services on an emergency basis, above all in education and health. It had done so despite the fact that UNRWA staff had come up against enormous obstacles in carrying out their duties. Such obstacles had become greater and more serious as a result of the 1967 war and the Israeli occupation, which had led to more Palestinians having to move to neighbouring countries.

37. Kuwait felt deep sympathy for the Palestinian people and well understood the sufferings caused by an occupation, since it had itself suffered for seven months after the invasion of its territory by Iraq. That fact enabled Kuwaitis to appreciate what such an occupation by Israeli forces meant for Palestinians. Kuwait knew the atrocities and cruelties that invading troops could commit. Indeed, the atrocities committed by the Iraqis in the territory of Kuwait had not been directed only against Kuwaitis, but also against other Arab and non-Arab communities - including the Palestinian community, which was the largest - living in Kuwait at the time of the invasion. A large part of the Palestinian community had had to leave Kuwait as a result of the Iraqi invasion. It was estimated that some 250,000 people had had to flee from Kuwait for that reason, making the job of UNRWA even more complex. Meanwhile the climate in the region was tense, which had already had an effect on the services provided by UNRWA. All those circumstances made the need for international support still more pressing, in terms not only of financial assistance but also of efforts to find a comprehensive solution to the Palestine question, which was unquestionably the cause of the situation in which the refugees found themselves.

38. Kuwait welcomed the Declaration of Principles signed in Washington on 13 September between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel. The Declaration was a first step towards achieving a just and lasting peace in the region, in conformity with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). The peace process initiated in Madrid, in which Kuwait had participated and continued to participate, should enable the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination and to the establishment of a Palestinian state in its own territory; it should also lead

(Mr. Al Otaibi, Kuwait)

to Israel's withdrawal from all the territories it occupied and to the recognition of the right of all Palestinians to return to their homes, in conformity with General Assembly resolution 194 (III), paragraph 11.

39. Kuwait had taken part in the meeting of donor countries held in Washington in October 1993 and was committed to funding development projects in the Gaza Strip and Jericho. Details of such funding would be announced later. Kuwait reiterated its support for UNRWA's activities and was prepared to welcome any project or activity that might serve to resolve the difficult situation of the Palestine refugees.

40. Mr. Kalpagé (Sri Lanka) took the Chair.

41. Mr. ELARABY (Egypt) said that since the Middle East Peace Conference in Madrid it had been clear that the international community was on the way to finding a just and comprehensive solution of the Palestine question. The signing of the Declaration of Principles between the PLO and the Government of Israel represented a historic step forward towards resolving the problem of the Palestine refugees. It was, however, clear from the UNRWA report that the positive developments had not been accompanied by any corresponding improvement in the living conditions of the Palestinians. Neither the Palestinian refugees nor the Palestinians living in the occupied territories had seen their living conditions improve, while in the Gaza Strip in particular the situation could be seen to have worsened. The report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA clearly showed that the economic and social situation in the occupied territories had deteriorated owing to the rise in violence. It was to be hoped that the signing of the Declaration of Principles by the PLO and Israel would lead to substantial changes in the situation of all Palestinians and to the ending of Israeli practices which violated the fourth Geneva Convention.

42. The positive developments in the Middle East peace process did not reduce the task of UNRWA, but instead made it more complex. The evolution of the situation would determine whether its activities and programmes should also be modified in order to improve living conditions for refugees. New problems must be solved and additional goals established, but there was no doubt that UNRWA, because of its long experience in the field and the specialized knowledge of its staff in all areas, would have an important role to play during the transition period between the signing of the Declaration of Principles and the holding of further negotiations leading to a final peace agreement. The Palestinian authorities should take full advantage of the experience and knowledge of UNRWA staff. Egypt hoped that, in consultation with the PLO, UNRWA would continue to play its valuable role in the occupied territories and to support the peace process. In that respect, Egypt would favour the transfer of some agency staff from Vienna to the occupied territories, in order to make UNRWA activities even more effective.

43. Although UNRWA had managed to reduce its budget deficit, the Government of Egypt believed that the international community should increase its financial support to enable the Agency to confront adequately its increasingly complex

(Mr. Elaraby, Egypt)

tasks in the fields of education, health, employment and food supply, among others, in the new situation arising as a consequence of the peace agreements. He hoped that all pledges for contributions made by the international community at the conference held in Washington in October 1993 would be fulfilled. The Agency had prepared over 100 projects for the establishment of the necessary infrastructure in Palestinian communities and for job creation, and the promised financial contributions must materialize in order for those projects to be executed.

44. Although the road to a just and lasting peace would not be an easy one and would require all the parties involved to modify their positions, it was to be hoped that the next report of UNRWA would reflect a more encouraging picture. The situation of Palestinians living outside the occupied territories, in Lebanon, Syria and other countries must not be overlooked. UNRWA should not execute new programmes and activities in the occupied territories at the expense of those directed towards Palestinians living outside those territories. Neglecting th- needs of those other Palestinian communities would have negative repercussions on the peace process.

45. Mr. ADNAN (Malaysia) said that his delegation had carefully studied the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA and found the work of the agency laudable. Despite the political progress achieved, much remained to be done. Malaysia had joined the international community in giving financial support to UNRWA and had made an initial pledge of $5 million to assist the Palestinian community in the rehabilitation and development of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, beginning with Jericho.

46. It was regrettable that, as indicated in the report of the Commissioner-General, loss of life among the Palestinian population in the period under review had been significantly higher than during the preceding period. Malaysia deplored the continuing deterioration of the socio-economic conditions of the Palestinians as a result of the closure of the Gaza Strip and West Bank by the Israeli authorities. That measure had affected not only the Palestinians but also UNRWA staff and activities. His delegation urged the international community to adopt measures to redress the situation.

47. Addressing the problems of refugees had never been an easy task, and there was no partial solution. The question of Palestinian refugees, in view of its long history and their geographical dispersion, posed great challenges to the international community, in particular to UNRWA. Malaysia hoped that the signing of the Declaration of Principles by the PLO and Israel would pave the way for further negotiations, and the final resettlement of the Palestinian refugees in their homeland. His Government supported the Commissioner-General's initiative to address the refugee problem within the framework of a final solution to the question of Palestine. All aspects of the resettlement process deserved careful consideration, and the authorities must recognize the right to citizenship of the persons displaced by the crisis. Malaysia supported the view

(Mr. Adnan, Malaysia)

of the Palestinian delegation that citizenship should be granted to every single Palestinian, including those displaced from the West Bank and Gaza Strip since 1967. UNHCR must be directly and totally involved in finding a solution to that question.

48. The resettlement would be successful only if the refugees were prepared to be resettled voluntarily in designated areas. They must be equipped and trained to reintegrate with the local population, both socially and economically. Thus, UNRWA efforts to provide education and training facilities should be strengthened. Malaysia, therefore, would maintain its regular contributions to UNRWA and stood ready to provide additional assistance in the development of training programmes, human resources and health-care services.

49. Mr. ABDELLAH (Tunisia) said that he had listened with interest to the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA (A/48/13) and had taken note of the activities being conducted by the agency in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian refugees and provide them with essential services and assistance in health and education.

50. The Committee was considering the work of the Agency in circumstances quite different from those of the previous year, the PLO and Israel having recognized each other and signed the Declaration of Principles for the establishment of a provisional autonomous government in the Gaza Strip and Jericho. The recognition of the rights of the Palestinian people, especially the right of refugees to return to their homes in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III), was a major step forward.

51. Until a solution to the Palestinian problem and a settlement of the conflict in the Middle East were found, on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and other relevant General Assembly resolutions, Israel should abandon its repressive practices against the Palestinians and fulfil its international commitments, especially the provisions of the Declaration of Principles. Only thus would the rights of the Palestinians be respected and the way be opened to peace in the region.

52. In support of the peace process, Tunisia had participated in the multilateral meetings and had hosted the fourth meeting of the working group on refugee questions, where it was agreed that a seminar on family issues would also be held in Tunisia in December 1993. The mission of UNRWA assumed greater importance than ever during the transition period, not only in its humanitarian aspects but in its economic and social aspects. Tunisia would continue to assist UNRWA as much as possible and urged the international community to ensure that it could continue its work during the transition period, which would be decisive for peace throughout the region.

53. Mr. ABOUL-NASR (Observer for the League of Arab States) said that despite hopes which had been raised by the Madrid Conference and the election of a new Government in Israel, the desired progress had not been achieved. The Commissioner-General's report confirmed that the situation of the Palestinians had continued to deteriorate owing to the repressive policies of the occupying Power, particularly curfews, illegal settlements and the confiscation of land, in violation of the relevant United Nations resolutions and the fourth Geneva Convention. Nevertheless, with the change in the situation it was to be hoped that the Government of Israel would implement Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and that lasting peace in the Middle East would be achieved.

54. It was likewise to be hoped that mutual recognition by the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Government of Israel and the signing of the Declaration of Principles would facilitate the search for a solution based on the exchange of land for peace. Steps must be taken to ensure that Israel withdrew from the occupied territories and that the Palestinians could exercise the right to return to their homeland and the right to self-determination.

55. The Arab League appreciated the work done by UNRWA under extremely difficult circumstances, including in particular, the lack of security for its staff members. He hoped that the steps to which he had just referred would facilitate the Agency's work and that the relocation of some of its offices to the area would increase the effectiveness of its programmes.

56. UNRWA would be performing a vital role during the transitional period until a lasting, peaceful settlement was achieved. It was therefore crucial that the international community should contribute generously to the Agency's budget so as to enable it to continue its assistance to Palestine refugees.

57. Mrs. DAPUL (Philippines) said that she had welcomed the signing of the Declaration of Principles by the Government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which had been preceded by mutual recognition by their leaders. Her Government fully supported the peace process not only between the Palestinians and the Israelis, but also among the other Arab States and Israel. Although negotiations between the parties would be arduous, especially with regard to the question of Palestine refugees, they would lead to a final settlement of the conflict based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). Mention should be made in that connection of the results of the recent meeting in Tunisia at which the working group on refugee issues had dealt with questions relating to family reunification and assistance to Palestine refugees.

58. Negotiations among the parties should be accompanied by confidence-building measures, and would be successful only if the living conditions of the Palestinians improved. Her country therefore attributed great importance to the development of an economic and social infrastructure in the occupied territories. In that connection, it was pleased to note the pledges made by members of the international community; although it could not contribute

(Mrs. Dapul, Philippines)

financially to the reconstruction of Palestine, it was willing to participate in the process by sharing its expertise in the medical and engineering fields.

59. The recent developments would have an impact on UNRWA operations and programmes for Palestine refugees. Given its experience and the importance of its activities in the area, UNRWA had an important role to play in the economic and social development of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It was therefore necessary to maintain and enhance the services provided by UNRWA, not only in the occupied territories but also in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. Her delegation hoped that the Agency's donor base could be broadened, and that given the new circumstances it would be able to continue its work in safety.

60. Mr. AL-SULTAN (Saudi Arabia) said that the Committee was considering the work of UNRWA in altered circumstances. Positive changes would lead to a new era in which the Agency would be able to carry out its programmes more effectively.

61. In his report (A/48/13), the Commissioner-General of UNRWA highlighted the sufferings of the Palestinians resulting from harassment by the Israeli Government and from its repressive practices. Israel should abandon such practices and comply with the United Nations resolutions on the question of Palestine. One of the Palestinians' most serious problems was that of the reunification of families. Only a small number of those who had been obliged to leave their homes as a result of the 1967 act of aggression had been able to return to their homeland, owing to restrictions on travel between Jordan and Gaza. The refugee problem could be solved only if the individuals concerned were permitted to return to their homes and if compensation was paid to those who did not wish to return, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). He therefore urged Israel to abolish the restrictions and to assist UNRWA in fulfilling its humanitarian task, in order that the Palestinian people might live in its homeland in peace and security.

62. His country hoped that the peace negotiations and the agreements that had been reached, as well as the efforts of the international community, would lead to a lasting peace in the region. In the meantime, it was essential that UNRWA should continue its work.

63. Mr. ZIAUDDIN (Bangladesh) said that since its establishment, UNRWA had provided services to more than 2.8 million Palestine refugees in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip who for the past four decades had been living in extremely difficult conditions. Although the Commissioner-General's report indicated that conditions could get worse and that the settlement of the refugee problem was still remote, it was to be hoped that the exchange of letters of recognition by the Governments of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, as well as the signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements would benefit all parties in the region.

(Mr. Ziauddin, Bangladesh)

64. His Government believed that peace and security in the occupied territories and in the Middle East ultimately lay in the solution of the question of Palestine refugees and in a just and fair settlement of the Middle East problem within the framework of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). If the Peace Accords were to be successful, the Palestinians must be given an opportunity to improve their well-being, and to develop a sound socio-economic infrastructure in the affected areas. That would not only help to sustain the foundation of a Palestinian nation but also ease political tensions, thereby promoting the cause of peace and stability. UNRWA should continue to play an important role in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as well as neighbouring areas where Palestinians had taken refuge. The international community should wholeheartedly support UNRWA short-term projects on education, health clinics, relief and social services, which would improve physical and social services infrastructure and create new employment opportunities for the estimated 40 per cent of the workforce which had been left idle since the closure of the occupied territories in March. Although the needs of Palestine refugees in Lebanon, Jordan and Syria must be duly recognized, it was essential to give priority to projects designed to improve the living conditions of Palestine refugees in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Financial support was needed for the timely completion of all the ongoing and proposed projects. The Agency's financial prospects for 1993 were a cause for concern, especially since the growth in the level of contributions had not been keeping pace with the growth in the number of UNRWA programmes, the higher demand for basic services and rising costs. The adoption of austerity measures would have an adverse effect on the sensitive political and economic climate of the region, endangering the fragile peace process. It was therefore important that major donors should increase their contributions and support for UNRWA during that crucial period, and that all concerned should be punctual in making their contributions.

65. The important agreements reached recently between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel were a turning-point in the history of the hitherto war-torn and tension-ridden region. In order to move the process along to its final culmination, everything possible must be done to support the Agency's humanitarian and development activities aimed at improving the well-being of the Palestinian people.

66. Mr. LOTFI (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that since the establishment of UNRWA in 1949, the Palestinian people had continued to live in deplorable conditions in the occupied territories; according to the report of the Commissioner-General (A/48/13), collective punishment, involving curfews, punitive demolition, the sealing of houses and other practices, such as the shooting of anti-tank rockets against Palestinian homes, had continued, which was a matter of grave concern. The report stated that the number of injuries and deaths, particularly among children, had increased. It also described the alarming conditions in which Palestinian refugees lived and the aggressive actions taken by the Israeli authorities. Iran believed that such acts of

(Mr. Lotfi, Islamic Republic of Iran)

aggression against refugees violated all international norms and should be condemned by the international community.

67. Education could play an important role in improving the scientific, social and economic aspects of the lives of people in the occupied territories; accordingly, his delegation was concerned at the policies and practices of the occupying authorities which had prolonged the closure of educational institutions in the territories.

68. The safety of UNRWA staff was of crucial importance. The Israeli security forces had shot and killed two Agency staff members in the Gaza Strip and were continuing to subject the staff to mistreatment involving beatings, threats, insults, intimidation and temporary detention. The international community should condemn those actions.

69. Socio-economic conditions in the occupied territories were also a source of concern. The confiscation of land had continued, and Palestinians continued to have less access to water resources than settlers. UNRWA required the continued support of the international community in order to improve the living conditions of the Palestinian people. The Islamic Republic of Iran was continuing to make its annual contribution to the Agency. The Palestinian people expected the international community to help it to achieve its inalienable rights, including the right of all refugees to return to their homeland and the right to establish an independent State in Palestine.

70. Mr. GORDON (Israel) said that his delegation shared the hopes and views expressed in the preface and the letter of transmittal of the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA (A/48/13), since the exchange of letters on recognition and the signing of the Declaration of Principles by the PLO and the Government of Israel marked a turning-point in the region in general and in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in particular. It was to be hoped that the era covered by the report was gone forever, and that the information provided would be evaluated in the context of the developments in the peace process. The accusations, polemics, bitterness and rhetoric of the past should be put aside in order to build a better future.

71. His delegation also shared the view expressed by the Commissioner-General concerning the good working relationship and the spirit of understanding arrived at between Israel and UNRWA in promoting the economic and social advancement foreseen in the agreement. Israel had extended full cooperation to the United Nations bodies which were providing assistance to the inhabitants of the territories, including UNRWA, and to the task force assigned by the Secretary-General, and trusted that, despite some dissonant voices, it would be possible, when the current session of the General Assembly was over, to say that it had been the first session to be held in the era commencing with the signing of the agreement between Israel and the PLO.

(Mr. Gordon, Israel)

72. In accordance with the Declaration of Principles, the question of the 1948 refugees would be discussed within the framework of the permanent status negotiations, which would commence no later than the beginning of the third year of the interim period (Declaration of Principles, art. V, para. 2).

73. The modalities for the admission of persons displaced from the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967 would be decided by means of an agreement to be concluded by a committee consisting of representatives of Israel, the Palestinians, Jordan and Egypt (Declaration of Principles, art. XII).

74. The readmission of former Palestinian residents who had overstayed their permits abroad would be discussed in the bilateral negotiations with Jordan.

75. Israel had agreed to approve 2,000 cases of reunification (involving some 5,000 individuals) per year on family and humanitarian grounds. That was an ongoing process. In addition, his Government had agreed that some 6,000 Palestinians who were on temporary visits and who had remained beyond the date authorized in their original permits would be accorded permanent residence status.

76. Israel had released and would continue to release significant numbers of Palestinian prisoners and detainees and would allow them to return to their homes. Deportees would also be allowed to return. That subject was being discussed within the framework of the negotiations currently taking place between Israel and the PLO concerning the Gaza Strip and Jericho area.

77. The agreement on the Declaration of Principles had created a climate conducive to unprecedented progress in the economic sphere. Various development projects, in such areas as communications, transport, energy, tourism, agriculture, financial markets, investment, trade, vocational training, regional networks and construction, had been discussed and agreed on; they would contribute to the economic prosperity of the region and would create many jobs.

78. The entire region had embarked on a clearly defined road to reconciliation and reconstruction. However, there were numerous difficulties ahead, and greater efforts must be made to overcome them.

79. Mr. MALONE (Canada) said that there had never been a time in the history of UNRWA when its work could be discussed with so much hope; his delegation applauded the courageous steps taken by the Israelis and the Palestinians through their mutual-recognition agreement and Declaration of Principles. His delegation also welcomed with satisfaction the signing of the common agenda by Jordan and Israel and hoped that similar measures would be taken by Syria and Lebanon, so that a just, comprehensive and lasting peace could be achieved in the region, on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

(Mr. Malone, Canada)

80. As outlined in the Declaration of Principles, authority would be transferred to the Palestinians in such areas as education and culture, health and social welfare. UNRWA was particularly well qualified to assist the Palestinians in providing essential services and in developing their economy and institutions.

81. Every effort must be made to demonstrate to the Palestinians and Israelis that peace offered more opportunities than conflict. To that end, international financial support was essential. At the international donors' conference held in Washington, D.C., Canada had pledged $55 million over a period of five years to support peace in the Middle East. Canada welcomed the first meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee established at that conference, as well as the Copenhagen Action Plan developed by the regional economic development working group of the multilateral peace process. If assistance was to be effective, it must be focused and coordinated.

82. Canada welcomed the active participation of UNRWA in the multilateral working group on refugees, whose essential responsibility was to improve the living conditions of refugees. At the Working Group's most recent meeting in Tunis, the United Nations had submitted a valuable inter-agency initiative combining the efforts of UNRWA, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on behalf of Palestinian children and youth. Canada had supported that initiative, and now took the opportunity to invite Member States to join in the project. The Tunis meeting had stressed that the refugee communities in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria must not be overlooked.

83. Canada was deeply concerned by the chronic and critical shortfall in the funding of UNRWA over the years, and it urged countries that had not contributed financially to the work of the Agency to do so at that critical juncture in the peace process. His delegation looked forward to the success of the new agreements and of others to come, and to the establishment of new Palestinian institutions, which would enable UNRWA finally to complete the task it had been given 40 years earlier.

84. Mr. AL-MERRIE (United Arab Emirates) said that UNRWA had performed nobly in assisting the 2.8 million registered Palestine refugees. The Agency's operations during the period covered by the report had included educational and health services, relief and social services, the construction of new schools and the expansion of clinics to help disadvantaged Palestinians, notwithstanding the serious financial difficulties the Agency was experiencing.

85. However, his delegation deplored the measures adopted in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip by the Israeli military authorities, who had committed acts of aggression against UNRWA personnel, threatening them and temporarily detaining them. Some UNRWA staff members had also been deported, provoking protests by the Agency. In March 1993, closures in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip had caused the economic and social conditions of the Palestinians to deteriorate

(Mr. Al-Merrie, United Arab Emirates)

seriously and intensified the unemployment problem. Also, the demolition of houses had reduced the level of assistance.

86. In resolution 302 (IV), adopted in 1949, the General Assembly had established UNRWA to assist the Palestinians expelled from their homes by Israel in 1947 and 1948. At that time, the impression had been that the problem of the Palestine refugees would be resolved in a short time. Yet their plight had endured for more than 40 years as a result of Israel's refusal to implement General Assembly resolution 194 (III), in clear violation of the fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Israel had also not complied with the other relevant General Assembly resolutions, including resolution 47/69 of 14 December 1992, despite the approaches made by the international community.

87. To resolve the financial situation of UNRWA, all countries and relief agencies must adopt collective measures as soon as possible. Otherwise, the Agency would not be able to carry out all the programmes it was planning, both immediately and in the future, in order to improve the living conditions of the Palestinian people.

88. Mr. ALAMUDDIN (Lebanon) said that the item on Palestine refugees had remained on the General Assembly's agenda for 44 years, but that the situation of the refugees had not improved. On the contrary, their tragic plight had continued to deteriorate, even after the signing of the Declaration of Principles by the PLO and Israel. The situation of the refugees was a consequence of the Israeli practices in the occupied territories, which constituted patent violations of the relevant resolutions of the United Nations and of international conventions and treaties. The recent Israeli aggression against villages in southern Lebanon was a clear indication that Israel still intended to maintain a climate of violence in the region.

89. Lebanon was ready to continue participating in the peace talks between Israel and the Arab countries which had been going on for the last two years and to facilitate full implementation of the results of the talks. However, if the peace process was to end in clear success, the situation of the Palestine refugees must be borne in mind, and a just and lasting solution to the problem must be found. The solution of the problem of the refugees was a basic element in the overall solution to the entire question of Palestine. A comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the problem of the Palestine refugees must be found on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 425 (1978), and it must include as an absolute prerequisite the withdrawal of Israel from all the occupied Arab territories. Lebanon rejected any attempt to relocate Palestine refugees in Lebanese territory. The relocation in Lebanon of Palestine refugees would be a violation of the sovereignty and integrity of the Lebanese State.

90. With respect to the activities of UNRWA, Lebanon continued to be the country of asylum for a great number of Palestine refugees, to whom it provided assistance of all kinds, despite its limited resources owing to the post-war conditions in his country for over 16 years. Lebanon was continuing to pay a

(Mr. Alamuddin, Lebanon)

high price in economic terms and in terms of human life as a consequence of Israel's occupation of the southern sector of its territory. Despite the hope of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA that the current report would be the last and that the situation of the Palestine refugees could soon be resolved, his delegation believed that the Israeli practices since the signing of the Declaration of Principles by the PLO and Israel did not confirm that hope, and it was necessary to continue making sustained efforts to resolve the tragic situation of the Palestine refugees once and for all. The Commissioner-General's report indicated the obstacles to the work of UNRWA as a result of the measures adopted by Israel in the occupied territories. In that connection, Lebanon stressed that the UNRWA headquarters should return to Beirut, in compliance with the relevant General Assembly resolutions, taking into account the fact that stable security conditions now prevailed in that city, where the Agency could carry out its work with greater ease and at less expense. Other agencies of the United Nations system had once again established their offices in Beirut, and UNRWA should follow their example. The Commissioner-General himself stated in his report that the general situation in Lebanon had improved since the election of the new Government.

91. Mr. AL-ZAYANI (Bahrain) said that, since the beginning of the peace process in the Middle East three years earlier, a new hope had sprung up of finally achieving a solution to the question of Palestine. That hope had recently been confirmed by the signing by the PLO and Israel of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements. However, the Declaration was only a first step towards a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question, which would have to be based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

92. The agreements signed by the PLO and Israel would greatly affect the work of UNRWA, which would become more complex and difficult and require more funds. With its over 40 years of experience in activities in the field, the Agency would have an essential function to perform when the agreements were implemented.

93. Despite the great discrepancy between the Agency's funds and the needs it must meet, it had made appreciable progress in improving the effectiveness of its programmes and activities.

94. The Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East had expressed concern over the lack of funds for 1992 and 1993, especially for the fund for Extraordinary Measures in Lebanon and the Occupied Territories (EMLOT). The Commissioner-General and the Working Group had also expressed concern over the shortfall for 1993 and 1994. Bahrain hoped that the Agency would find the funds needed to carry on its activities.

95. Mr. TÜRKMEN (Commissioner-General of UNRWA) expressed appreciation for the delegations' support and said that the Agency would perform the task the Committee assigned to it during the transition period.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.